

**Access to Microfinance & Improved Implementation of Policy Reform  
(AMIR Program)**

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*Business Associations Communications/Advocacy Consultancy*

*Final Report*

**Deliverable for Business Association Initiative  
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## Executive Summary

The AMIR Program Business Associations Initiative retained Robert McDermott and Rami Khouri in the fall of 1999 to conduct an assessment and analysis of the role of business associations in Jordan in focusing public interest and debate on issues and in influencing public policy. This process involved working with seven leading associations to determine the value that might be created by more active participation in the forum of public opinion, and their existing capabilities in communications and advocacy.

This effort was driven by the strategic view that effective advocacy and communications programs by key business associations in Jordan are vital to the evolution of a new role by the private sector: a role defined by pro-active positions and by increasing initiative.

The resulting assessment and analysis posited the following conclusions:

- Marshalling public opinion and placing issues on the public agenda are new concepts in Jordan. Until now, personal contacts and influence within the government ministries have been the primary levers of change.
- Business associations are key stakeholders in the transition of the Jordanian economy to privatization and WTO membership. It is in their interests to educate the public in general about the new 'rules' of the economy, as well as to influence the direction of public policy toward a more open economy. It is clear that H.R.H. King Abdullah is relying on the support of the private sector in his determination to bring about economic and social change.
- Associations are the natural advocates for strategic policies designed to support the growth of the Jordanian economy in the future. These issues range from educational curricula and technical training to the role of women in the economy. Through effective communications programs and 'image management', the associations can also play a vital role in attracting needed inward investment to Jordan.
- While the overall level of advocacy and communications capabilities in the associations is at present quite modest -- it is a field of specialization that does not yet exist in the country -- there can be found in a number of these organizations both a recognition of its importance and a keen interest in developing this capability.

Based on this analysis, it was determined that the AMIR Program should move forward in working with committed associations to develop core public relations and advocacy skills. This would involve identifying the strategic interests of each organization in the forum of public opinion; developing internal communications capabilities and tools; learning how to deal effectively with the press, both within and outside Jordan; and creating a public relations plan and program with specific activities, targets and time-lines.

We also saw in one or more of the smaller, voluntary associations the potential for leadership by example. By working closely and directly with these groups, we could help launch public relations programs that would demonstrate to other groups not only what is possible, but what values can be achieved via well crafted communications and advocacy efforts.

As a result, second consultancy was designed and implemented in February/March, 2000, with the primary objective of transferring skills and launching specific communications activities.

### **Objectives of the Consultancy**

Based on prior experience, it was determined that the next step in working with the associations to develop their communications capabilities should involve several dynamics:

- Providing executives of the key associations with an operational model for the communications and advocacy function within their organizations.
- Expanding understanding and mastery of the tools of communications to encompass broadcast and internet media, visual imagery, innovative strategies and access to foreign news media.
- Proposing major communications initiatives to several associations for their consideration and possible implementation.
- Working directly with association staff on existing communications projects, i.e. news releases, newsletters, annual reports and web-sites, and on critiquing and improving their current materials.
- Addressing the challenge all the business associations share of building and retaining membership and communicating the relevance and value of being a member.

The concept of an “operational model” was quite straightforward. The goal was to provide each organization with a framework, appropriate to its size and resources, for a communications and advocacy function. This could be staffed internally or rely on effective management of outside contractors. The key elements typically involved:

1. Defining a mission: this could extend from such a local issue as improving member communications to eliciting press coverage outside Jordan.
2. Putting in place a system for identifying and acting on communications opportunities.
3. Developing a press contact program, which could involve not only local Jordanian journalists but foreign correspondents in Amman Beirut and Jerusalem.
4. Creating the capability to write and distribute press releases in an effective and timely manner.
5. Designing and managing effective internet sites, in terms of both graphics and content.
6. Developing a publications program.
7. Creating a methodology for building strategic communications coalitions with other associations

The vehicles for addressing these objectives were a sequence of two one-and-a-half day group workshops, in which each of these areas of focus comprised the core curriculum. In addition, we also conducted news and press coverage analysis exercises as well as writing exercises.

These workshops were supplemented by meetings and working sessions with each of five major business associations. In addition, an informal briefing on public policy advocacy and on event public relations was held with the board of the Jordanian-American Business Association.

The format of the workshops was designed specifically to avoid a ‘lecture’ environment and focus on problem solving. Cases and problems were put forward for participants to solve. This proved highly productive, not only promoting more lively and active sessions, but spawning ideas among the groups.

## Acting as Ad Hoc Coalitions

One of the primary mechanisms for leveraging the influence of the private sector on public dialogue in Jordan is the formation of ad hoc coalitions among the business associations around specific issues. The Jordan *Vision 2020* Initiative, to which 28 business associations are pledged as signatories, is a major step forward in this direction.

The strategic value of using coalitions to amplify the voice on a given issue was stressed in both workshops and individual meetings with the business associations, and several current targets of opportunity identified. Perhaps most notable among these is a campaign currently planned by the Business and Professional Women's Association to void specific provisions in the existing social security and pension law, These deny to working women – though not to men – the right to pass on their benefits to their families at death (these revert to the state) or, unless married, to withdraw their contributions.

While this law can very likely be successfully changed via direct lobbying of members of parliament and key ministers and civil servants, it was recognized that this provides an issue through which the BPWA can build awareness of its identity and purpose among target publics. It is also one on which associations can easily act in alliance, since there is little if any controversy involved: the law itself is probably unconstitutional.

It is important in our view for associations to experience working together in alliance. But it must be recognized that there are inherent obstacles to this cooperation. The voluntary associations compete with each other for paying members, and are unwilling to dilute their identities in mutual undertakings.

This pivotal area of communications and advocacy strategy should remain a key focus of future training and development.

We have put forward a proposal that the associations who are signatories to the Vision 2020 initiative adopt a common *Vision 2020* logo or symbol, and employ it uniformly on their stationery, newsletters, web-sites and other publications – as well as develop new uses for it. While this idea is quite popular, it remains to be seen whether anyone in the associations will take the initiative to drive it forward.

Because it will be challenging over a time span of twenty years to sustain the momentum of *Vision 2020* or hold public interest, we have also proposed the issuance of an annual progress report, beginning in 2001, accompanied by a major publicity effort. This will require leadership on the part of at least one of the business associations, as well as extensive and ongoing collaboration.

## Status Reports on the Individual Associations

### The Young Entrepreneurs Association

The YEA is probably the most advanced and innovative of the business associations in terms of communications and advocacy. This is no doubt due in large part to the fact that the executive director, Ghalia Aloul, is a former journalist. The YEA recently hired a full-time public relations officer, Maher Ghanma, a young graduate of American University in Beirut. While his experience is limited to an internship with a newspaper, Ghanma is exceptionally bright, energetic and motivated.

During the consultancy, we worked with Ghanma on a news release – his first – as well as on editing the pending YEA annual report and organization brochure. At the same time, YEA played a prominent role in the Mediterranean Economic Forum in Cairo, and issued a press release on its involvement that was carried widely in Jordan. The YEA is clearly capable of planning and implementing a sophisticated advocacy and communications strategy, as well as providing leadership and example to other business associations.

A proposal made to the YEA is for the organization to take the initiative in forming an Amman Press Center to serve as a networking and information switchboard for both foreign and Jordanian journalists. This need not involve purpose-specific physical headquarters, but can be a virtual center – at least in its formative period – based on regular meetings at a hotel or other appropriate site.

The YEA has agreed to consider taking the initiative to launch this endeavor.

### Business and Professional Women's Association (BPWA)

While the BPWA has no in-house communications executive – nor at this time an executive director – their young attorney, Ala'a Al-Kurdi, is very active in advocacy and communications.

Staff vacancies are clearly responsible for a hiatus in activity. Nonetheless, Al-Kurdi is committed to moving forward aggressively with a three-phase advocacy and public communications strategy to promote a change in the current social security and pension law which is biased against women. It is clear that the BPWA learned a great deal from the failure of the recent initiative to change the 'honor crimes' law, which enables men who kill female family members on suspicion of adultery to escape significant punishment.

In that case, too much publicity too soon, and too extensive an involvement by the foreign press, created a backlash among conservative members of parliament. In addressing the social security issue, the BPWA plan is to move carefully in three sequential phases. This strategy grew out of our joint discussions and analyses, and a recognition of the role of timing in achieving the optimum impact. Whether successful overall or not, this advocacy and communications strategy promises to be a model not only for the BPWA, but for other business associations.

In our discussions, the BPWA expressed dissatisfaction with its web-site, and we encouraged them to take immediate steps to change its design and content to better serve their goals. We also discussed the challenge of promoting a feature story on women's rights issues in Jordan, with an ambitious target such as National Public Radio in the U.S. or the BBC. The upside in this venture would be to educate western audiences to the quite advanced status of women in Jordanian society, their extensive participation in the workforce, and related issues. We plan to press this informally.

The upcoming BPWA program in which Sudanese women lawyers will come to Amman for training and consultation in addressing women's civil rights issues also provides an opportunity to emphasize the BPWA's leadership on these issues in the Arab world.

### Jordan Trade Association (JTA)

The Jordan Trade Association is overall a quite sophisticated organization, focused on delivery substantive value to its members and eager to enhance its ability to use communications effectively. The JTA has in development at present a very well produced CD-ROM designed to serve as a core information brochure as well as a compatible web-site.

The JTA also wants to prepare a membership benefits brochure and to test newspaper advertising as a vehicle for recruiting new members. There is currently a quarterly newsletter in English, with 90 percent of its circulation of roughly a thousand outside Jordan. This is targeted primarily toward trade and potential business contacts. The executive director would like to produce this monthly, and in both Arabic and English.

To raise the profile of the association and promote membership, the JTA will begin an awards program this year to recognize outstanding achievement by exporters. This will be open to members and non-members alike.

In May, 2000, the JTA is mounting a trade mission in the U.S., focused primarily in southern California. Public relations support in the U.S. for this mission could amplify its impact substantially.



### Amman World Trade Center

The WTC is unique in that it is part of a global network of trade centers, and that its primary service to members is to deliver new business opportunities and trade contacts.

With a communications specialist on staff, the WTC is quite effective in getting its story out to target audiences in Jordan. The staff does believe now that its newsletter, transmitted bi-weekly via e-mail, has outlived its usefulness, and that members no longer pay much attention to it. The plan is to replace this with a quarterly magazine this year, with substantive editorial content.

The WTC intends to seek advertiser support, and to produce a four-color publication in English that can also serve as a marketing communications tool to reach target audiences worldwide.

We made two proposals to Yassar Toucan, the executive director. The first, to which he responded enthusiastically and pledge to pursue, is the development of a proprietary index for some aspect of the Jordanian economy. This would provide a news generating and identity building vehicle that the WTC can brand. Initial efforts will involve designing and implementing survey research, and will probably focus on a Business Confidence Index.

The WTC is also very active in training and professional education. We proposed that it consider extending this role to sponsoring two to three public lectures per year by major personalities from both inside and outside Jordan. These would also provide a 'brand' identity vehicle for the WTC, and help position it as an organization that commands important intellectual assets and produces real value. Speakers and topics would not be restricted narrowly to business and economic issues.

### Amman Chamber of Commerce

Communications and advocacy efforts by staff of the Amman Chamber of Commerce confront a frustrating sequence of bottlenecks in the form of elaborate approval processes by the board of directors. As a result to date, very little gets done.

This reflects not a lack of interest, but the fact that the ACC is a very large (30,000 members) and traditional organization, and one that does not rely on voluntary membership. The staff believes, however, that the legal requirement that all businesses be members will be dropped by the government in the near future. In the face of this, they believe the ACC must communicate real value to its membership and the public or wither away.

With patience and support, the ACC is capable of restructuring to develop an effective advocacy and communications capability. It is like a battleship. It takes a long time to turn around, but once headed on a new course it will tend to adhere to it. Due to its prominence and size, the ACC is a logical lead voice for the private sector in Jordan.

Near-term targets include resuming the publication of the ACC's monthly magazine, which was dropped two years ago, and to transform it into a more effective communications vehicle. A web-site is also in development. The ACC is committed to recruiting a staff public relations officer, and is in the process at present.

#### Jordanian American Business Association (JABA)

While AMIR has limited involvement with the advocacy and communications program of JABA, their staff is active in attending our workshops. We also met with directors for an informal discussion of advocacy and communications strategies.

JABA has created real value thus far by producing the first issue of a newsletter that is outstanding in design, structure and copy. Locally produced at reasonable cost, this is a model and teaching tool we are using for all the business associations.

## Challenges

Substantial if uneven progress has been made by this group of business associations in mastering the art of advocacy and communications and in putting them into practice. Continued progress on this front is vital if they are to realize their potential as active and influential voices – individually and collectively – for the interests of the Jordanian private sector. Broad societal change is clearly underway in Jordan, and the contributions of the private sector in shaping that change are invaluable.

The key advocacy and communications challenges we see in the months ahead are:

- *Jordan Vision 2020* campaign. This is a high-visibility opportunity to capture public attention and interest inside and outside Jordan. Collaboration by the 28 associations who are signatories is critical and accepted. This issue now is “Who is in charge here ?” At least a core group of active associations needs to agree on a plan and time-line, and clear responsibilities need to be assigned. As a practical matter, only a small core group of business associations will be capable of and interested in seizing and driving this project forward, while others will be passive fellow-travelers. It is important that we identify the leaders and concentrate our efforts on them.
- Opinion influencers and target constituencies outside Jordan. Opening the economy and achieving higher levels of growth will depend largely on foreign investment. Perceptions of Jordan in Europe and North America are widely distorted. Initiatives by the associations to access the foreign press and get across important messages could be of considerable value. We believe that AMIR should take the lead in orchestrating this effort, both with individual associations and via coalition, to ensure a base of experience that be built upon.
- News vs. feature stories. All the associations are now quite capable of producing and issuing news releases and generating press coverage. We believe that we should continue to emphasize improving press relations and widening contacts with editors and reporters. But we also want to shift emphasis toward a new goal of developing more inclusive feature stories in newspapers, magazines and broadcast media. We recommend working with each group on a pilot project.
- Web-sites are clearly an issue in terms of purpose, target audiences, design, content and performance. We recommend addressing these problems one-on-one with each association. We also would propose to explore the possibility of linking all the BA’s web-sites via hyperlinks to each other, as well

as to a shared base that would provide incisive information on Jordan and the Jordanian economy.

- Organizations such as the JTA would derive considerable value from communications support in the countries in which trade missions are planned. The primary focus, which requires planning and action well in advance of the mission, would typically be trade and industry publications and local newspapers in cities visited. This is an activity the BA's could well learn to undertake themselves. Initially, however, they will need an operating 'model', as well as press contact information.

## **Modus Operandi**

In moving forward on the program to build advocacy and communications capabilities and resources in the business associations, we recommend the following framework:

- Identify the business associations with substantial commitment taking initiatives to lead the private sector in advocacy and communications, and work with them intensely.
- Shift from workshop or seminar format to working individually with associations.
- Place primary emphasis on the business associations' existing advocacy and communications efforts, and stress 'best practices' models to enable them to become more effective in their day-to-day operations.
- Begin to orient the associations toward measuring and evaluating the effect of their communications activities.
- Optimize the value delivered by Messrs. McDermott and Khouri by ensuring that they are complementary and not overlapping. McDermott's primary role should be to provide intensive focus on learning and improving communications strategies and tools. Khouri's time and efforts should be weighted more toward ongoing advisory work with the individual associations, and the provision of direct advice and assistance.
- We should determine whether Messrs. McDermott and Khouri might play a useful role for association staff by building understanding of the advocacy and communications mission and its value among their board members.